‘’THE PROBLEM OF FRENCH CANADA’’

‘’R. Dowson, Fall 1945’’ *(Handwritten note)*

Up until recently the problem of French Canada has received scant study by our movement. Neglect of this question leaves a serious gap in the development of a revolutionary program for the Canadian workers.

In order to understand the problem and its significance it is necessary to make a short historical sketch of the development of French Canada.

The feudal régime of Old France was transposed to the New World in the early 17th century. Large estates and land grants were bestowed on the French nobility, merchants and ecclesiastical organizations and a tight fisted feudal economy with its cens and rentes, banalité, tithes etc. was imposed on the settlers.

How the British conquest kept feudal elements in place to this day

The British conquest in 1759 replaced many of the departed seigneurs with English merchants and officers and sought as a base for the subjection of the country the support of the Church and the remaining French seigneurs whose feudal claims they guaranteed. The seigneurial system was gradually abolished by a long succession of acts extending from 1822 to 1940 – The motive power for its abolition arose from the oppressed habitant and the merchant seigneurs who wished to destroy ‘’the held in trust tenure’’ and open the vast territories for capitalist exploitation.

Feudal money tribute which is being paid even to this day and what is more the right of banalité (ownership of mills, presses etc. by the seigneurs only) and corvée has been the legacy of the French Canadian habitant; a legacy of backwardness and fetters to the development of the whole of French Canada. The following figures give one an idea of the retardation of capitalist development in Quebec agriculture. The proportional role of agriculture and industry in Quebec and Ontario is almost equal. Agriculture in Quebec accounts for 15.5% of the total value of production and gives employment to 22.2% or 254,280. In Ontario it accounts for 18.67% of total value or production and gives employment to 264,480 or 17.7% of population. With an occupied farm population only 2.5% less than Ontario, Quebec agriculture receives less than one half as large a cash income, employs one half as much permanent wage labor and utilizes machinery of a value one half as great as Ontario. Feudalism with its banalité, cens and rentes and corvée (labor for the seigneurs) raised enormous barriers to the natural development of capitalism in French Canada by its hindrance to free wage labor commodity circulation etc

The clergy in the interests of the tithe, cheap farm labor and its religious hegemony attempted to keep the people on the land but the land monopoly and the increasing population limited to a self contained economy produced insolvable

contradictions. Immigration to the United States and the Canadian West was the only outlet. With the opening of the 20th century and a tremendous industrial expansion the landless French Canadians were absorbed. The rural population from 1891 to 1931 has remained stationery, the population increase being absorbed by the towns and factories. Quebec presented monopoly capitalism with tremendous numbers of wage laborers ignorant, unschooled and under the oppressive thumb of the church combined with unequalled natural resources.

A concentration of monopolies thrives amid a weak French Canadian petit-bourgeoisie and a super-exploited working class

The Canadian economy is in the merciless grip of an unparalleled concentration of monopolies. In Quebec, monopoly capitalism has found its richest field of exploitation. In 1938 less than 2% of the total number of establishments in Quebec held 67% of the total capital, employed 41.9% of the industrial workers and accounted for 58.4% of manufactured production. Quebec which for 200 years was fettered by the seigneurial system today closely parallels Ontario in production. The 1931 census disclosed that two thirds of her population is urban. In 1936 of 147 establishments employing over 500 in Canada, 62 were in Quebec and 70 in Ontario. In 1940 manufacturing accounted for 56.2% of Quebec`s total production compared to 57.3% in Ontario. The war with the development of the world`s largest aluminum plant, aircraft units and shipyards has upset these figures in Quebec's favor.

Monopoly, an inevitable development of capitalism has been preeminent in maintaining nationalistic sentiment within French Canada. ''Down with the trusts'' is the rallying call of all French Canadian political parties for the trusts in Quebec are foreign trusts being predominately non-French. The frustrated petit-bourgeoisie sees their enemy in the trusts. Feudalism retarded the growth of French Canadian capitalism and gave English Canadian capitalism, with all its connections, an open road. In 1937 it was estimated that the proportional division of industrial capital in Quebec was 44% English-Canadian, 34% U.S., 19.8% French Canadian. Out of 861 directorates in the 83 largest banking and industrial firms in Quebec, 93 or 10.8% are held by French Canadian businessmen. There is a small but nonetheless powerful handful of French Canadian millionaires fully integrated in the top circles of the Canadian bourgeoisie. Technical and managerial staffs in industry are predominantly English Canadian and English-speaking.

Monopoly capitalism pyramided on the feudal aftermath has made of Quebec a hellhole of poverty, disease and corruption. Quebec labor is the most exploited labor in the Dominion of Canada. The French Canadian worker's inferior economic position to that of his fellow Anglo-Canadian worker can only be understood as a form of national oppression.

	Per capita income – and Retail sales 1940	
Canada	$240	$218
Ontario	530	267
Quebec	358	135

Comparison of wages and hours 1941 *(slightly abridged – ed.)*

	Montreal Que.	Quebec City	Brantford Ont	Toronto
Bricklayers	$ .92/ 44 hrs	$ .85/ 44-48 hrs	$1.00/ 44 hrs	$1.13/ 40 hrs
Plumbers	.90/ 44 hrs	.65/ 44-48 hrs	.75/ 44 hrs	1.10/ 40 hrs
Civic Empl.	.40/ 48 hrs	.45/ 48 hrs	---	.63/ 44 hrs
Factory labor	.44/ 54 hrs	35/ 59 hrs	.45/ 55 hrs	.63/ 48 hrs

Percentage of Female workers earning less than $1000		Males
Quebec	92.7%	59.2%
Ontario	76.5%	48.9%

Average weekly earnings in Quebec and Ontario industries

	Quebec		Ontario	
Sector	Male	Female	Male	Female
Pulp & Paper	29.00	11.46	30.67	15.30
Cotton Yarn & Cloth	17.62	12.06	21.61	15.44
Primary Iron & Steel	25.16	16.12	30.89	18.54

In 1941 the death rate from TB per 100,000 population was 26 in Ontario, 80.6 in Quebec. In Westmount, Quebec, a well-do-do English residential district, it was 30.7; in Rimouski, Quebec it was 542.2.

Infant mortality per 1000 live births in Ontario was 45.6; in Quebec 75.9. In Three Rivers Quebec in 1937 it was 297. In Bombay India in 1936 it was 250.

The British after their successful military conquest made the church and the loyal seigneurs their base of control over the still rebellious habitant. These were the organs that counteracted any collaboration with the American colonial struggle for independence – the organs that diverted the struggle of 1837 from the land problems into parliamentary reforms. The church whose tremendous land holdings were respected by the British became the largest accumulation of primary capital in Quebec. Today she has large investments in railways, newspapers, factories etc. – it has been estimated that her holdings total over 600 millions.

Because of her large holdings the church was a violent enemy of those who would destroy feudal relationships and is today a most energetic partisan of capitalist enterprise. Education, controlled by the church as been of a clerical classical nature developing few technicians or tradesmen. Compulsory education for children up to 14 years was only introduced in 1943. The women's vote and recognition of her legal rights were likewise passed by the Quebec house *(l'Assemblée nationale –ed.)* quite recently (when?) In Ontario there are 468 public libraries, in Quebec there are 27 and only 9 of these are French. Illiteracy in Quebec is double that of Ontario. The church supported by both the Anglo- and French-Canadian bourgeoisie has been the most powerful force in blocking

the development of the French Canadian peoples – the most powerful force in the maintenance of the low wage level and the isolation of the French Canadian worker from the development of his Anglo-Canadian brother.

The almost total absence of a French Canadian middle-class, of French Canadian technicians etc. which English Canadian and American capital could use as a base in their exploitation has caused the question of tongue to assume great importance. Anglo-American trusts, their company towns and their English-speaking manager and foreman communities, are, to the French Canadians, foreign encampments on Quebec soil. While 30% of the population of Canada is French only 14% of the functionaries at Ottawa are bilingual. The BNA Act supposedly provides for the equality of the 2 languages and guarantees minority rights by the federal government. New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario have prohibited the French the right to educate their children in their language in the schools. Bilingualism in the English schools in Quebec is a farce. The inferior economic position of the French Canadian worker inevitably gives his tongue an inferior status.

The artificial unity of Canada and the right of Quebec to self-determination

The unity of Canada is an artificial unity neither conforming to her economy or peoples. It was born of the fear of the expansionist ambitions of the United States and the railway plunderers' desire for greater credits. The unity of Canada and her borders are not sacred to revolutionary socialists. Lenin inscribed on the banners of Marxism the right of oppressed minorities to self-determination. We stand by the right of French Canadians to self-determination. To reject this slogan as one which will atomize the workers or as a slogan that runs counter to that of a Socialist United States of America would be false. Socialism will never be built on a subjugated peoples.

''Victorious socialism must achieve complete democracy and consequently not only bring about complete equality of nations but also give effect to the right of oppressed nations to self-determination – i.e., the right to free political secession. Socialist parties which fail to prove by all their activities now – as well as during the revolution and after its victory that they will free the enslaved nations and establish relations with them on the basis of a free union – and a free union is a lying phrase without right to secession – such parties would be committing treachery to socialism'' – Lenin.

But does that mean that today we raise the slogan of self-determination as an agitational slogan or only as a programmatic one which will possibly become agitational in the future.

A strong nationalist sentiment bent under reactionary and clerical hegemony

There is today in French Canada a strong nationalist sentiment – its most popular expression until the last election was the Bloc Populaire. While there is no close unity of thought or action in the nationalist movement there is complete unanimity against

separatism. When the parliamentary nationalist freebooters approach the elections they all proclaim adherence to confederation.

> Duplessis, Sept. 20, 1948:
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> ''Some people say we shouldn`t talk about autonomy. They are under the impression that we want to build a wall around Quebec and separate it from the other provinces. All we want is control of the rights given us in the Confederation Constitution of 1967.''

> Feb. 5, 1944:
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> ''The Bloc called for absolute independence for Canada, the abolition of appeals to the Privy Council, the severance of all links obliging the submitting of Constitutional changes to England, admission of Canada to the Pan American union.

> Aug. 3, 1944 – Laurendeau:
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> ''The Bloc does not want to destroy confederation or set up a totalitarian or clerical state. We are living in a unique moment to get rid of financial imperialism and capitalist dictatorship in order to give back to the province and the whole of Canada a true democracy.''

In order to obtain a real picture of the nationalist movement it is not sufficient to see it as it characterizes itself today nor is it sufficient to analyze it as it stands now. It is necessary to understand its past in order to appreciate its future. The nationalist movement does and has contained the most reactionary elements in Canadian political life varying from the avowed Fascism of Adrian Arcand to Dubuc's ''Buy at Home Movement'' and La Jeunesse Patriote's ''Laurentia.'' Its foundation is the church which wishes to shelter the French Canadian people from the more politically and socially conscious Anglo Canadians in order to retain her religious hegemony. The national bourgeoisie and the religious orders possessing large land holdings and industrial investments wish to return and further depress the French Canadian workers' and farmers' low wage level and standard of living. In this task they receive substantial aid from Anglo Canadian capital. Anglo Canadian capital supports the cloistering of the French Canadian peoples (and) endorses the supremacy of the Catholic church and supports as the lesser evil the Catholic Syndicates *(unions –ed.)* Anglo Canadian and American capital are friends of French Canadian Nationalism.

How does the nationalist movement find support among the French Canadian masses? By a skillful mixture of demagogy, lies and progressive demands, it feeds on their justified discontent. It receives most of its support from its violent anti-trust, anti-monopoly campaigns. The French Canadian bourgeoisie and their agents oppose the exploitation of the French Canadian workers by the trusts – the foreign trusts – in order that they may be the sole exploiter. And what in a positive sense do the nationalists offer to block this inevitable development of capitalism – legal restrictions. Buy at Home Movement in trustified Quebec, return to an agrarian self-sustaining economy, etc. French Canadian revolutionists must expose the futility and the reactionary aspect of the

nationalist anti-trustism. Turn the French Canadians anti-trustism to anti-capitalism! The traditional anti-militarist, anti-imperialist sentiment of the French Canadian worker is utilized by the nationalists who have no foreign investments at stake and who wax fat on the production of the workers in the war industries. This sentiment must be developed to organize a struggle against imperialist war along revolutionary lines *(document cut off, ed.)*

The essential character of the nationalist movement is that it is negative and opportunistic. It feeds on the justified dissatisfaction of the workers and farmers only to divert their revolutionary potential up backwaters. It dare not strike at the roots of language, cultural and wage discrimination for they are entwined around the keystone of the social order – capitalism. Wherever the nationalist movement has come out with positive demands and solutions it has exposed its social origins. Arcand – The Corporative State – Anti-semitism, etc. Dubuc – Buy at Home – further lower the standard of living – La Jeunesse Patriote – Laurentia – Back to the church and a peasant economy. The nationalist elements were the opposition to the women's vote and the compulsory education act, were the supporters of the Padlock Law and are the friends of the Catholic Syndicates.

No progressive ends served by the secession of Quebec at this time

What progressive ends would be achieved by the secession of the French Canadian peoples from Confederation at this time? The answer is obviously none. The relative strength of reactionary forces within the French state would be increased and a comparatively new and inexperienced working class would be isolated from the mainstream of labor development. At this period to support a policy of secession would be to play into the hands of reaction. We cannot bind ourselves to support a policy of secession under all circumstances. Situations may arise where this will be employed by the bourgeoisie for reactionary ends – thus in the case of an impending revolutionary situation in English Canada both the English and French capitalists may attempt to split away Quebec and salvage their system there. In this situation we would fight against secession. But regardless whether we advocate secession at a given moment or not we recognize the right of the French Canadians masses to decide for themselves.

However the sentiment that the nationalist movement exploits is essentially progressive – that is the desire for language and cultural equality, the opposition to racial discrimination, the demand for wage equality etc. We support democratic rights, the democratic demands of the French Canadian peoples. We are resolutely opposed to Anglo-American and French capitalism's use of French Canada as a cheap labor market – we are opposed to discrimination in the shops.

For a militant and unified trade union movement of both English and French workers. Down with the Catholic Syndicates! We demand the complete separation of the Church and State – the complete severance of church interference in education. The hostility to the trusts and the opposition to the war offer the revolutionary socialist movement particularly fine opportunities to develop wide support. Turn anti-trustism into

anti-capitalism! Workers control of the war industries! Expropriation of all war profits!

The problems of the French Canadian workers will not be solved in the framework of the bourgeois state. The fate of the French Canadian workers and farmers is irrevocably bound up with the fate of the rest of Canada's workers and farmers. Socialism is the order of the day. A socialist Canada and a Socialist United States of America is the future.
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